

Alcohol and a healthy lifestyle

For many people, responsible drinking can be part of a healthy lifestyle. Check out the guidelines below. Then log in to blueshieldca.com/hlr, click on *Health Programs*, and select *Alcohol Use* to find tools and resources that can help you start thinking about the relationship between your health and moderate alcohol consumption.

It's all about moderation

The key to including alcohol in a healthy lifestyle is – you guessed it – moderation. Federal health guidelines define moderate drinking as two drinks a day for men under 65, and one a day for women and anyone over 65.

That doesn't mean a jumbo-sized cocktail counts as a single drink. Nope, one standard drink is any of these:

- 12 ounces of beer or wine cooler
- 8.5 ounces of malt liquor
- 5 ounces of wine
- 3.5 ounces of fortified wine (port or sherry)
- 2.5 ounces of liqueur
- 1.5 ounces of brandy
- 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits (vodka, whiskey, etc.)

Who shouldn't drink?

Some people shouldn't drink at all, including alcoholics, pregnant women, children, people with certain medical conditions- and people on certain medications. Alcohol interacts with many common prescription and over-the-counter drugs, including antibiotics and pain relievers.

Talk to your doctor to see if moderate drinking is safe for you. And of course, never drink if you're driving.

Drinking and dieting

If you're trying to lose a few pounds, you may want to cut out even moderate drinking. That's because alcohol has little nutritional value but lots of calories.

For example, five ounces of wine or 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits has about 100 calories, and 12 ounces of beer about 145 calories, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Don't start now

Although alcohol may reduce your risk of some heart problems, according to the National Institutes of Health, that's no reason to start drinking. There are other ways to boost your heart health, such as staying active, eating a healthy diet and maintaining a healthy weight.

The vitamin B factor

Alcohol moderately depletes your body's supply of folate, a B vitamin that may help lower your risk of heart disease, colon cancer, and breast cancer. If you drink, you can make up for this depletion by eating a healthy diet and taking a multivitamin that has at least 400 micrograms of folic acid, according to the Harvard School of Public Health.

Know when to get help

Anything beyond moderate drinking can be very damaging, or even fatal. Binge drinking (more than five drinks at a time) can harm your body and raise your risk for accidents, injuries and assault. Years of heavy drinking can lead to liver disease, heart disease, cancer and pancreatitis, and can cause problems at home and work, warns the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Do you drink alone when you feel angry or sad?
- Does your drinking ever make you late for work?
- Does your drinking worry your family?
- Do you ever drink after telling yourself you won't?
- Do you ever forget what you did while drinking?
- Do you get headaches or have a hangover after drinking?

If you answered "yes" to any, you may have a drinking problem. Don't ignore this. Talk to your doctor to see if you should cut down or stop drinking completely.

Alcohol and a healthy lifestyle

You can find more information about alcohol and your health at Healthy Lifestyle Rewards, an online program that helps you take steps toward living a healthy lifestyle.

Personalized tools and programs can help you eat healthy, exercise regularly, quit smoking and more. Just log in once a week, use the tools and programs, and begin reaping the rewards of a healthy lifestyle.

To get started today, register at blueshieldca.com/hlr. To find alcohol information, log in and click on *Health Programs*, then select *Alcohol Use*.

More online resources

1. General information about alcohol consumption

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/alcoholconsumption.html

www.thecoolspot.gov (alcohol information for young teens)

www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov (your drinking habits and your health)

2. Alcohol and cancer

www.cancer.org/downloads/PRO/alcohol.pdf

3. Alcohol and aging

www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/alcohol.htm